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ABSTRACT

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ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND TIME

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Abstract

Writers have noted how the concept of time is a key component of organizational behavior. This article argues that an interpretive perspective of organizational culture provides a useful framework within which to consider time. The article differentiates between rationalist and cultural conceptions of time, and lays out a framework for organizational time as an element of culture. The author concludes with suggestions for administrators with regard to the cultural context of time.

Sister Vera, president of a hypothetical Catholic college, has created an uproar. The faculty, administrators, and staff have bombarded her with negative comments about her plan to abolish Honors Day. "We're so busy now," she observes, "Don't they see that we don't have a day to waste? Perhaps we could have a luncheon instead, during Commencement, when we have more time to spend on frivolous activities."

Across town, President Smith of Working Class State College greets students in the cafeteria as he makes his way to Dean Cowden's table. One student confides to another, "That's what's so nice about this place. Everybody knows everybody. Even the president." President Smith, however, is worried. As he sits down to talk with Dean Cowden he shakes his head and says, "The legislature still hasn't approved the budget. They are way behind schedule. I don't know what I'll do. People need to be paid. It's no way to run a college."

After the president and dean finished their conversation Dr. Cowden hurried off to a curriculum committee meeting. He met a student en route to the meeting and engaged in friendly conversation for a few minutes. When Dean Cowden entered the meeting the chair of the committee icily stated, "Now that everyone has arrived, we can begin. Our agenda is quite full, and we are beginning late because some members have wasted our time."

In part, Sister Vera's, President Smith's, and Dean Cowden's problems focus around problems with time. One individual does not have enough time, another individual is about to run out of

time, and the third individual has wasted a committee's time. How individuals use their time is often a source of organizational conflict. Consistently, writers have noted how the concept of time is a key component of organizational behavior. Likert, for example, notes with regard to organizational performance and leadership, "the variable which now appears to be particularly important is time" [14, p. 79].

If time is a key variable in administrative behavior, then it is important to delineate the ways researchers and administrators think about organizational time. What are the assumptions behind our constructs of time? What are the implications of our assumptions? What alternative ways might one think about time?

In this article I offer an alternative view of organizational time. I argue that the interpretive perspective of organizational culture provides a useful framework within which to consider the use of time in organizational settings. The article first differentiates between rationalist and cultural conceptions of time. Proceeding from the notion that organizations are socially constructed, the article then lays out a framework for organizational time as an element of culture. I then suggest that understanding time through an interpretive view of organizations as cultures has far-ranging ramifications for the analysis of organizations. In the final section I offer three suggestions for administrators to consider with regard to the cultural context of time.

I. Organizational Perceptions of Time

The rational view. Previous research on how administrators use time in organizations reflects the common perception that time is composed of discrete, instrumental units. Acts that occur in time are viewed as a succession of decision-making events, advancing in a linear progression. Following a rationalist framework, researchers have conducted studies that have provided managers with prescriptions for managing time.

Whetton and Cameron [24, p. 107], for example, advise managers to "hold all short meetings standing up," and "meet visitors to your office outside in the doorway," and "cancel meetings once in a while." Mackenzie [15, p. 38] calls upon management theory to help extricate harried managers from "the time trap." At one point he suggests, "write down the most important tasks you have to do tomorrow and number them in order of importance." Purvis [19], Oncken and Wass [17], and Lakein [13] likewise provide guidelines for a manager's more effective use of time.

Each of the above mentioned writers considers time from the vantage point of a rationalist. Berger, et al., comment on this perspective by saying, "Modern technology and modern bureaucracy presuppose temporal structures that are precise, highly quantifiable, (and) universally applicable" [2, p. 149]. From this viewpoint individuals in modern organizations treat time as a limited asset so that it can be "spent," "wasted," "saved," "shared," and "used up."

One considers time from this perspective from the point of view of organizational roles. A manager, for example, is likely to rely on formalized, scheduled meetings that begin and end at specified points in time. One might think of such a view as linear; individuals interact within set chunks of demarcated periods of time that progress and move forward. In this light, time organizes role-related activity in organizations.

An understanding of time as linear is predicated on the assumption that an organization is a rational, objective, "real" entity. Time is not an abstract concept; it is a concrete element that structures the organizational universe. Instead of taking for granted that individuals have unique capacities to order time, the rationalist assumes temporal structures exist in the organization that are role-related. Different organizational roles spend time in different manners. Whether one works in one organization or another is of little consequence; managerial effectiveness depends upon how one manages time.

Rationalist assumptions about time stem from the earliest studies of modern organizations by writers such as Frederick Taylor [20; 21]. Taylor's assumptions still exist although the methods managers use to implement effective time management practices will differ. Thus, environmental and organizational demands cause the manager to use alternative time management practices. Whereas a manager, for example, may once have had little need for weekly meetings with a cadre of mid-level managers and more of a need for direct supervision of semi-skilled

workers, the reverse may be true today. That is, the manager now may well need to order time differently because of the training and qualifications of the staff.

Nevertheless, the rationalist assumption remains; a manager faces real problems with real solutions in real time. The failure to find the right solution often relates directly to the failure of the organization to successfully utilize its time efficiently and effectively.

The cultural view. Another way to think about reality is to view an organization as a social construction that represents a dialectical, continuous interaction between the constructed perceptions of participants in the organization and the forces that impinge from the wider social order. The previous discussion assumed that an organization is a comprehensive, rational, set of facts. Alternatively, a cultural view sees the world as more than a conscious set of demographic facts and figures. The organization is not merely the sum of its parts. Instead, the capacity of the organization to create its universe through on-going attention and interpretation becomes highlighted.

Reality is neither objective nor external to the participants; rather, we define organizational reality through a process of social interchange in which an individual's perceptions are affirmed, modified, or replaced according to their apparent congruence with the perceptions of others. Instead of viewing the organization as rational, the model is based on a social construction of reality [1].

Because culture plays such a prominent role in understanding organizational reality, it is virtually impossible to separate a discussion of time from culture. Viewing time as a dimension of an organization's culture with its own inherent rules opens up an alternative way to think about both individual and organizational time. Geertz expands on this alternate view: "The close and immediate interdependency between conceptions of person, time and conduct is ... a general phenomenon. Such an interdependency is inherent in the way in which human experience is organized, a necessary effect of the conditions under which human life is led" [8, p. 408].

The implications of a cultural view of time are highly relevant to understanding the dynamics of an organization. Analyzing the cultural dimensions of time makes explicit what we take for granted in our everyday lives. Rather than one linear mode of temporality to which all managers must conform, several contextually specific temporal dimensions appear. Edward Hall notes: "It is not enough to tell ... people to be on time or to plan ahead. Time is like a language and until someone has mastered the new vocabulary and the new grammar of time and can see that there really are different systems, no amount of persuasion is going to change behavior" [11, p. 185].

Administrators, then, need to be like talented linguists who understand the deep structures of language, but always begin anew when they confront a new linguistic type. Just as it is inappropriate to assume that speaking Italian in a French-speaking

country will be effective, so is it mistaken to believe that the way one makes sense of time in one organization will be the same as in another. Similarly, however, individuals who speak more than one language often find a new language not so difficult as the neophyte because they understand the deep structures of language. The temporal challenge for the administrator is to comprehend the multiple dimensions of time.

In short, the way administrators spend their time can be effective in one organization and ineffective elsewhere because of the cultural context of time. As a result, role-related maxims such as those noted in the previous section need to be understood not as decontextualized notions of organizational behavior, but rather in light of the context-specific ways that actors make sense of the organization.

Individuals enter an organization and adapt to its culture by adopting behaviors to which the organization has given sanction and legitimacy. The way the organization uses time is one cultural dimension that a new organizational participant needs to understand. If we move away from a linear assumption about temporality than how might we consider organizational time?

II. Dimensions of Time

The dimensions of organizational time are a cluster of concepts, events, and rhythms that cover an extremely wide range of phenomena. Evans-Pritchard once observed that classifying the dimensions of time "bristles with difficulties" precisely because the dimensions are not immutable; temporal dimensions are

constantly in flux due to the dynamic nature of human activity. Time also cannot be separated from other human activities. The challenge is to classify the different temporal dimensions in a manner so that temporal interrelationships can be seen as a coherent system. E. T. Hall has noted how in Albert Einstein's terms: "Time is simply what a clock says and the clock can be anything--the drift of a continent, one's stomach at noon, a chronometer, a calendar of religious ceremonies, or a schedule of instruction or production. The clock one is using focuses on different relationships in our organizational lives" [11, p. 15].

Thus, each dimension discussed below represents a radically different kind of clock. Viewed in this light and taking into consideration the different classes of time, it is important to note that the manner in which one understands one dimension is not applicable to another dimension. It is hopeless to try to make sense of individual time in terms of another dimension. These dimensions of time are like different universes with different laws.

Different <u>classes</u> of time refer to three kinds of time individuals may experience in an organization--organizational, systemic, and individual. An organization and its subunits have internal dimensions yet an organization also exists as part of a system of organizations. Thus, an organization also has systemic temporal dimensions. Individuals also bring their own personal histories and "interaction rituals" [10] with them when they join an organization. The struggle for the organizational

administrator is to comprehend the various dimensions within each classification, and to understand the interrelationships and contradictions of the classes and dimensions. It is these three classes of time--organizational, systemic, and individual--and their dimensions to which we now turn.

A. Organizational Time

Constructed. Constructed time structures how individuals respond to organizational dilemmas based on participant perceptions of the past [7]. The idea is that the organization provides the context for the way things get done. Although time still elapses in a sequential way, in organizations where a sense of constructed time is pre-eminent the forms of awareness of past, present, and future are closely interwoven and have vast potential impact on organizational change.

The internal tempos of the organization gradually evolve and transmute as individuals enter and leave. The organization and individuals exist in a symbiotic relationship whereby time is constantly re-constructed rather than static. Individuals spend their time differently in one organization than another because of the way the organization has constructed its temporal dimension. One organization, for example, will construct its time through a series of casual interactions and unplanned interchanges; another organization will rely extensively on formalized meetings and structured interchange.

Perhaps the most potent example of constructed time in higher education is the tenure system. An individual enters the

organization and the "tenure clock" begins ticking. The clock will differ from organization to organization and among individuals. People may stop the clock or speed up the tempo; regardless, all individuals are aware of this particular clock and the way the institution has structured the clock. Ostensibly, the institution judges the quality of an individual's work within the confines of the organization's constructed time.

Historical. This dimension of time does not so much concern the way organizational participants spend their day, but rather how they use institutional history as a context for decision making. In one way or another administrators must confront institutional history. For example, one way an institution might adapt to environmental pressure is to augment programs that enhance the identity the institution has cultivated for itself in the past. Conversely, an institution may adapt to an environment by changing its focus and mission. In both cases, historical time is a major factor in administrative decisions--in the first case by affirmation, in the second by rejection.

In part, history provides participants with an organizational saga that constantly demands reinterpretation in light of a changing environment. "A saga is indeed a switchman," notes Clark, "helping to determine the tracks along which action is pushed by men's self-defined interests" [5, p. 510]. The point is not that institutional identity as highlighted by an organization's saga or mission cannot change, but rather that as change

takes place historical time enters into administrative decision making as a key element.

Ceremonial. Ceremonial time refers to what one individual notes as "an indefinite series or repetitions of an action which on each occasion is performed on the assumption that it has been performed before; its performance is authorized though the nature of the authorization may vary widely by the knowledge, or the assumption of previous performance" [9, p. 200]. The weight of tradition comes into play when it is understood simply as how particular events "should be."

In other words ceremonial time refers to specific events or traditions that reoccur throughout an organization's history. Ceremonial times are organizational landmarks whereby participants observe significant occasions in the life of the organization. As highly symbolic events, ceremonial time potentially denotes a multitude of meanings for organizational participants.

A university that celebrates its centennial provides testimony to the endurance of values which the community esteems. Similarly, the occasion of an Awards Day or Honors Day for a college provides the community with an activity that celebrates the worth of quality education. Consequently, organizational participants come to understand "what this place is all about" in part through the activities that occur in ceremonial time.

B. Systemic Time

Sync. The term "to be in sync" comes from the beginning of the motion picture industry when the sound track had to be

synchronized with the visual record on film. We have since discovered that human beings synchronize their motion when they interact. Each organization also has its own internal rhythm which is related to a larger system of organizations.

Organizations can be "out of sync" with their environment, implying that they are either "behind the times" or "ahead of the times." A college or university, for example, exists in a postsecondary system. During a period of declining enrollment and tightened fiscal resources, liberal arts colleges may find themselves "out of sync" with environmental demands for computer science and business courses. Single sex institutions may find themselves to be anachronisms as the larger system changes.

A typical response for an organization that perceives it is out of sync with the times will be to adapt to the demands of the environment. Liberal arts colleges will expand their curriculum or single sex institutions will become coeducational. If an organization is unaware that it is out of sync it runs the risk of decline; conversely, an institution may be aware that it is out of sync and reaffirm its unique identity with the hope that a market exists for an institution that does not wish to be in sync with all other organizations in the system.

Seasonal. An organization has a tempo geared neither to its own history nor to its own tradition, but rather to the system of organizations to which it is associated. For example, a university or college is an organization whose year "begins" in August and "ends" in May. Seasonal time marks the entire,

explicit, taken-for-granted system within which an organization operates.

American public colleges and universities also exist within a state system. The institutions must react to deadlines and funding cycles that conform to legislative formulas. To a certain extent, different constituencies within any college or university also must concern themselves with temporal realities dictated by federal legislation or private agencies. Student aid must be requested by a particular time, and proposals must be submitted during different cycles.

In general, organizational participants and the systems are highly resistant to seasonal change. The concept of the trimester for example, makes good economic sense for higher education; however, such a reform has been vigorously resisted by the academic community. Similarly, graduation requirements are based on the equivalent of four academic years of coursework. Although the way one uses that time has changed considerably, in general the higher education community remains steadfast in the belief that a bachelor's degree signifies the equivalent of four years of work.

C. Individual Time

Personal. Personal time focuses on the individual's on-going experience of time. Within this dimension we hear an individual say how "time flies" or "time crawls." One reader of this article commented how "some days are longer than others." Personal time is inherently subjective and related to an indi-

vidual's perception of time in the organization that is contextually oriented.

Personal time exists for all individuals in all organizations. Often, events or activities beyond the confines of an organization cause an individual to perceive his or her time as "flying" or "crawling." That is, even though the system and the organization help determine an individual's time, it is important to recognize that most individuals in modern society exist in a multitude of organizations--family, church, and civic organizations, to name but a few. One's experiences in other organizations influences how an individual experiences time in an organization.

A cultural view of organizations assumes that individuals have a dialectical relationship with their organization; they are not merely passive objects which an organization molds. Instead, individuals enter the organization with a multitude of experiences which influence how they conduct their tasks. Simply stated, family demands at home or obligations to other organizations impact on how a person experiences organizational time.

Interactional. The manner in which individuals interact in their organization has been labeled "ritualistic" by Goffman [10]. From this perspective, the organizational world of social encounters involves individuals in countless contacts with other participants. Insofar as individuals have discrete histories prior to entering an organization, an individual orientation of time comes into play in an organization.

As noted above, although an interpretive view of organizational culture assumes that reality is socially constructed, an individual's previous psycho-social states are taken into account. In part, it is individualist perceptions that help to continually recreate reality. An individual enters and exists within an organization with a particular ongoing perspective of time. Whereas one individual will experience a day, a season, or a year as inherently slow, another individual will experience that same linear time as fast paced.

Individual rituals account for any number of time specific activities where a person acts neither from organizational or systemic experience, but rather from the knowledge taken from one's own experience. One individual, for example, spends the opening moments of every workday morning reading the previous day's correspondence, whereas another individual may forego lunch and jog.

Personal and interactional time both incorporate a cultural perspective of how individuals exist within an organization's reality. The dimensions differ with regard to how individuals experience daily reality. The on-going activities that occur outside of the organization influences how the individual perceives of time in the organization. The rituals of daily life that an individual has created in part structures how the individual interacts within the organization. Personal time may change with great rapidity; interactional time changes with less frequency.

III. Interpretation, Culture and Time

Much of the confusion among the many theories of time derives from individuals who investigate one temporal dimension (constructed time, for example) and confuse that particular dimension with organizational reality. The approach called for here is to investigate all of the various dimensions of time in an organization to understand the organizational participants use time.

Given the way the participants experience time, organizational dilemmas may arise. An organization, for example, that places great emphasis on casual interaction over the noonday meal may frown on someone who is accustomed to exercising at the gym or eating at her desk. At the start of this article a hypothetical president had created anger in her institution because she misunderstood the importance of traditional time at her college; she relied instead on a rationalist conception of effective time. The president at Working Class State College had to operate within the constraints of one form of systemic time. The dean at the college operated in a form of individual time that was at variance with the constructed time of the organization.

The point is not that misunderstandings in organizations occur solely because of cultural differences in the perception or meaning of time. Clearly, a variety of forces occur in an organization that create organizational meaning. Time is one of those forces. To the extent that differences in the perception of time exist for an organization, it is imperative that adminis-

trators fully understand the different systems and dimensions of time. To ignore the temporal forces at work in an organization is to allow organizational confusion to occur.

To an extent, the status and role of an individual may help transform an individual's orientation to a particular temporal dimension into an organizational construction of time. That is, the strong-willed leader who expects individuals to stay at their desks over the lunch period may have the capability of transforming constructed time, but we should not assume that temporal changes come about due to managerial command.

Pierre Bourdieu speaks directly to the relationship of the individual to the organization: "Objective structures are themselves the product of historical practices and are constantly reproduced and transformed by historical practices whose productive principle is itself the product of the structures which it consequently tends to reproduce" [4, p. 83]. In other words, organizational life is inherently recursive. Organizations share and reproduce temporal notions of how individuals are to act; at the same time individuals shape and transform organizational ideas about how to use time.

I suggest that rationalist conceptions that neglect the powerful influences of the interpretive nature of an organization's culture and the dialectical relationship between the organization and the individual are flawed. The assumption at work in this article has been that individuals experience time in organizations from varying, often conflicting dimensions.

Throughout much of the history of organizational behavior, however, the rationalist paradigm has dominated how we conceive of time and its management. From Frederick Taylor's scientific studies to the more recent work discussed at the beginning of this essay we have assumed that primarily one variant of time exists for an organization.

Recently much writing has occurred about culture in organizations [18; 25; 6]. Yet in general, writers in this school of thought have reified concepts such as symbols so that we view ideas as functional artifacts that can be decontextualized and abstracted from the organization. "Management by walking around" for example, often appears as a temporal rule for effective management. In short, good managers spend their time walking about their organizations, and bad managers stay sequestered in their offices.

"Management by walking around" and other functionalist maxims are prescriptives that remain primarily within the rationalist paradigm. As an effective manager had to concentrate on a particular mode of time management in the early twentieth century, so must a manager of today. Although spending one's time walking around the campus may have interpretive aspects, essentially, such decontextualized rules are merely updated laws for the ways effective managers must spend their time.

The fundamental difference of an interpretive perspective of culture is that no predetermined rules exist for the manager about how to spend time. All of time's dimensions point the

analysis away from a rational model which places acts and events within demarcated periods bereft of institutional context, and toward an interpretive model which seeks to describe and comprehend the implicit grammar of time.

When we consider organizational culture from an interpretive perspective, we account for the ways in which organizations mediate and impose dimensions of time on different constituencies. For example, in her work about the culture of an urban community college Weis points out how time is one key element of struggle between faculty and students. "Students ... resent messages regarding the appropriate use of time. Students not only react to the fact the institution defines time for them, but they also respond to ... the arbitrary exercise of power" [23, p. 72]. Weis's contention is that the imposition of temporal practices by the faculty on the students, in turn, creates a student culture whereby a set of oppositional practices come into play that signifies an assault upon official notions of time.

Yet the institution defines temporal practices not only for students; any individual within the organization must come to grips with the contextually specific ways that temporality exist in the organization. The challenge to comprehend all of the various dimensions and systems of time and still manage the organization appears as a daunting task for administrators.

Although causal rules cannot be provided, what suggestions can be made for managers who wish to interpret their organization? In the next section we consider the implications of an interpretive view of time for administrators.

IV. Implications for Administrators

An administrator's agenda is packed with events from multiple organizational dimensions of time. Administrators know that time is a tool, so choosing and using temporal dimensions is crucial. Yet how-to-do-it suggestions about the way to manage one's time is inappropriate given the preceding analysis. What works for one administrator in one organization at one point in time, may fail abysmally in another organization, or the same organization at a later time.

I offer three suggestions for administrators to consider as they act within their organizational universe. Rather than provide instrumental solutions to how to effectively use one's time, I propose ways to uncover and comprehend organizational time. When we are able to interpret different temporal dimensions we are more able to deal with the complexity that characterizes organizational life.

Synchronize Managerial Time with the Organization. Anthropologists often discover that when they study a tribal group the tribe is unaware of alternative dimensions of time. Time occurs the way they experience it. Indeed, most individuals in traditional and modern society only have a "dim, passive awareness of cultural codes, symbols, and conventions that are at work" [22].

Similarly, administrators are often unaware that the way they experience time may differ from the way other organizational participants experience time.

An interpretive framework suggests that the greater understanding administrators have about their own temporal dimensions, the more alert they will be about the needs of the organization. Previous theories of leadership have called on managers to diagnose situations and adapt their actions to the participants and the situation [12].

Similarly, managers need to understand their own actions and how they might be adapted to better suit the needs of the organization. One individual may avoid meetings where nothing gets decided, yet alter his style when he realizes that the meeting serves as an important symbolic vehicle for the community. Another individual may at first make decisions based on rational decision making strategies that eschew institutional history, yet change her ways when the importance of the historical dimension becomes apparent.

The essence of this suggestion is that it may be more effective for the manager to alter his or her conceptions of time than to have the organization bend to administrative directives about time. Surely instances exist that are warranted for administrators to demand that the organization changes the way it uses time. Missed deadlines for proposals or individuals who consistently abuse their work situation by not showing up for

work are obvious examples where administrative action is justified.

Yet examples also exist where an administrator seeks to change the organization primarily because it suits his/her prerogative. The suggestion raised here is that it may be more appropriate for the administrators to mold themselves to the culture of the organization, rather than the reverse. In order for a manager to create a tight fit with the organization, than the manager must first understand how he/she uses the various dimensions of time.

Internalize the culture. The successful administrator will understand not only one's own uses of time, but also the organization's temporal dimensions. Organizations are not alike; even similar types of organizations may have widely divergent conceptions about the way they use time. I have visited a state college, for example, that is quite conscious about the way it uses historical time. I have also seen another state college--with a similar history--where its historical dimension is mute.

Mintzberg has noted "the manager faces the difficulty of the person putting together a jigsaw puzzle. Though always working with small pieces, he must never forget the whole picture" [16, p. 183]. We have considered six temporal dimensions in this article. Although an organization will vary the way it uses the dimensions, my assumption is that all organizations utilize each dimension in unique ways.

The challenge the interpretive manager faces is to understand each temporal dimension as a piece of the "jigsaw puzzle," and to be able to internalize how each dimension fits within the fabric of the culture. Managers also need to internalize the dynamic nature of the institution. Because organizational participants enter and leave the organization, temporal dimensions are constantly shifting. The manager must internalize the culture and understand its ebbs and flows.

Birnbaum has noted how effective managers "act thinkingly (that is, by paying attention, by discovering meanings, and by self correction) rather than unthinkingly (that is, by rote, impulse, or mindlessly) [3, p. 467]. Thus, managers need to explicitly comprehend their organization's temporal dimensions and how shifts in one area affect another dimension.

For example, one organization may find itself out of sync with its system and need to adapt. The adaptation, however, may necessitate different usages of constructed time. A change in one dimension implies change in another; the successful manager will try to orchestrate temporal dimensions so that time as a meta construct will be harmonious rather than dissonant.

Utilize cross-cultural information. American tourists often make temporal remarks when they return from visits to another country. One country has many ceremonies that surround business deals, another country has trains that arrive and leave precisely on time, and yet another country eats its evening meal late. Such comparisons strike all tourists when they visit a country

for the first time: "foreigners spend their time differently than us."

The same can be said for different organizational cultures. Myopic views of one's organization tends to obscure alternative possibilities for temporal change. We are often unaware that another organization may utilize seasonal time in a different manner than we do. The ability to understand how another organization constructs its reality allows the interpretive manager to reflect on ways to improve one's own culture.

My point is not that one should duplicate another's temporal dimensions. At the same time, we often are too close to our own reality to see that other temporal formats exist that may aid in the solution of a problem. The above-mentioned institution that existed as if it had no history, may benefit from understanding how another institution incorporates the historical dimension as a source of pride and heritage. Conversely, the state college that relied extensively on institutional history, may also benefit from observing that another institution is somewhat free to create its own history, relatively unshackled from the constraints of the past.

Conclusion

The analysis presented here views time as one critical element that organizational participants socially construct. The view accounts for how society tempers and mediates change, and how the inner processes of the organization focus time within these larger spheres. Not to consider time from this perspective

lessens our understanding of why organizational participants arrive at particular decisions, conclusions, and crises.

Institutional conflict is often precipitated by rationalist conceptions of effectiveness that neglect to consider time within an interpretive perspective of organizations as cultures. The new president who operates from formalized procedures may engender crisis in an organization where informality reigned supreme. A leader who ignores traditional time likewise may prompt cultural conflict. What may appear unimportant--an Awards Day, casual conversations with a colleague over lunch, or a symbolic speech about what the institution stands for--may be critical forms for implementing administrative decisions.

Time management practices based on decontextualized ideas about efficiency may prove worthless because of the culture of an organization. The point is not that one dimension of organizational time is more worthwhile than another; rather, participants may benefit by diagnosing their organizations as cultures from an interpretive viewpoint to understand the interrelationships and contradictions among dimensions. Once the dimensions have become clear to us we can begin to compare and contrast temporal dimensions across organizations and systems.

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